Understanding and Processing Emotions (Will Meek, PhD)

Process of Emotional Experience (Kennedy-Moore & Watson Model)

1. **Prereflexive Action**: An event creates an automatic feeling that is due to a physiological change within the body

2. **Awareness**: We become aware of the physical sensation.
   - Problems arise when we ignore the feeling or deny its existence.
   - *What are you feeling? What are the symptoms?*

3. **Labeling**: We give a name to the feeling we are experiencing.
   - Problems arise when we do not name them appropriately, or have an emotion vocabulary. Instead, we use words like "upset", "bad", or "weird".
   - *What is the name of this emotion?*
   - *How strong is it? 1----------10*

4. **Interpretation**: We draw conclusions about what occurred to produce the feeling.
   - Problems arise here when the cause is not acknowledged, there is a lack of attention to possible causes, or when there is a misattribution. When this is true, we say things like "I have no idea why I am feeling this way", place the cause on something that doesn't truly connect to the feeling, or blame another state, such as being "tired".
   - *Be honest, what really caused the feeling?*

5. **Evaluation**: We evaluate the feeling as being acceptable or unacceptable based on the situation, personal identity, personal history, and cultural expectations.
   - Problems arise here when we view an emotion as unacceptable, or a reaction to something illegitimate.
   - *<u>All</u> emotions are acceptable and valid signals of something that is happening, or are an understandable reaction to something.*

6. **Decision**: We make a decision to take action in response to the cause of the feeling (such as expressing it, or doing something related to the perceived cause), tolerate the feeling without taking action, or seek relief from it by other methods (redirecting attention, artificially changing how we feel, using a defense mechanism, etc).
   - Problems arise here when there are real or perceived limitations on expression, fear of "losing control", a low tolerance for negative emotions, use of unhealthy coping strategies (substance use, avoidance, primitive defense mechanisms, etc), or lack of access to or education about healthy coping strategies or alternatives.
   - *What would be a healthy way to cope with this emotion?*
   - *What is the result of doing it?*